

**Statement of Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing
“Outlook for Iraq and U.S. Policy”
September 10, 2009, 9:30am, Room 2172 Rayburn**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today.

The last time the Full Committee reviewed US policy toward Iraq, on April 9, 2008, General Petraeus and former Ambassador Crocker reported that all major violence indicators—such as the number of attacks against US and Iraqi forces, and Iraqi civilian deaths—had been reduced to close to the low Spring 2003 levels.

As a result, the “surge” was declared as having ended on July 31, 2008.

Among the surge accomplishments, some areas formerly written off as al-Qaeda strongholds are experiencing normal life.

Similarly, Iranian-supported Shia militias in Basra, Baghdad, and throughout the southern portion of the country were confronted by the Iraq government and U.S. forces in March 2008, and have since seen their capabilities greatly reduced.

Even with recent gains in security, both al-Qaeda and affiliated insurgent groups, as well as some Iranian-supported militias, remain potent threats in Iraq, and there can be no room for complacency.

The Administration must reinforce a policy which demonstrates that success in Iraq remains a national priority.

In a speech earlier this year, the President stated that: “by August 31, 2010, our combat mission in Iraq will end.”

He also asserted his intention to “remove all U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of 2011.”

However, the United States strategy must look at more than just when and how quickly U.S. forces should be removed.

A conditions-based strategy must be developed and implemented to ensure that U.S. strategic interests are preserved beyond the departure of U.S. forces.

The key US mission is to execute a transition over the period up to 2011 and beyond, that will create a strong, democratic, independent Iraq that will be a strategic partner in bringing further security and stability to the Gulf.

The U.S. must prepare to make the transition to a civilian lead that is backed by an adequate mix of U.S. resources and capabilities.

One thing is certain: The United States cannot sit idly by and allow the situation in Iraq to determine its own course.

U.S. involvement, particularly the role of our diplomats, in shaping and achieving an outcome supportive of our national security priorities is vital.

The U.S. strategy must include a training mission that will help Iraq become truly independent – not only of US forces but in dealing with the ambitions of all its neighbors.

With respect to those neighbors, particularly Iran, I'm concerned about Iraqi actions being undertaken at the behest of the Iranian regime with respect to Ashraf.

On that issue, what specific measures have been taken in the interim to ensure that the rights of the residents are being preserved, especially against their involuntary repatriation to Iran?

Given the detention of dozens of Ashraf residents, what is the position of the State Department on this situation?

How is the U.S. protecting Ashraf residents from physical and other harm?

Mr. Ambassador, these requirements raise the following questions:

Does the United States have a strategy, and an integrated civil-military plan that is operational, for overseeing the transition from a Defense Department to State Department-led mission?

How will the State Department take over the lead from the US military?

What has the Administration identified as the actions to be taken, the resources required, and the estimated benefits, risks, and measures of effectiveness for carrying out such a transition?

While we understand that some of this planning is already underway with the US team in Iraq, could you elaborate on how much of the planning is complete?

What set of contingency plans and options for dealing with serious crises, is the State Department developing-- particularly as our ability to respond diminishes steadily as our forces drop and Iraqi politics dominate events?

It is my hope that the same successful collaborative relationship that existed between General Petraeus, General Odierno, and Ambassador Crocker will continue under Ambassador Hill.

Strong civil-military relations and a robust civil military framework are instrumental to achieving success in Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, it is my sincere hope that this Committee will methodically, take stock of what has transpired in Iraq since April of 2008; what is the current situation; what our long-term priorities are; and determine the best way forward.